

**John Finn
on behalf of
Lewis & Clark Library and Broad Valleys Federation**

**Education and Local Government Interim Committee
Public Testimony
September 08, 2016**

Chairman Jones and Members of the Education and Local Government Interim Committee:

For the record, my name is John Finn (F as in Frank, I – N- N). I am a Montana librarian. Director of the Lewis & Clark Library serving Helena and Lewis and Clark County, Coordinator of the Broad Valleys Federation of Libraries, and Chair of the Government Affairs Committee for the Montana Library Association.

I left Montana in 2010 to manage a large branch of a very busy suburban library system outside of Portland, OR.

I made a joyous return to Montana this past January to be Director at Lewis and Clark Library.

On my arrival I inherited the very stable and forward thinking library team at Lewis and Clark. I was pleased to learn that since 2014 the Lewis & Clark Library has designated the increase in state aid per capita/per square mile for outreach services through the Bookmobile.

The Library, after many years of planning and saving, launched the Bookmobile in November 2012. The Bookmobile travels throughout Lewis & Clark County (3,458 square miles), providing outreach services to outlying towns and schools that do not have ready access to our library branches, nursing homes and assisted living facilities, two Hutterite colonies, after-school programs, the detention center and much more. People and organizations may also submit a request to have the Bookmobile present at special events.

The Bookmobile is a large vehicle, capable of holding around 3,000 books, audios, DVD's, and fun games and activities. When the program was first instituted we hired a Bookmobile and Outreach Services Librarian, who is both librarian and driver. We immediately discovered that demand for services was high and growing. In less than one year we discovered that we needed to hire a part-time Bookmobile Assistant in order to keep up with demand and offer a programming component. Without the increase in state aid, the Library would not have been able to create this part-time position. Additional staffing has led to increased services and more Bookmobile stops. Students at the small schools in Canyon Creek and Wolf Creek now have consistent access to the Library's collection and services. Outreach to the two Hutterite communities has been powerful and very well received, they are some of our busiest stops and highest in circulation. We are about to turn another corner with Bookmobile services. In the next Fiscal Year we will add yet another part time staff member to help drive and maintain the Bookmobile collections and create, plan, and present programming.

An off-shoot of the Bookmobile service is our outreach to the county detention center. Although the Bookmobile cannot visit the center, this department reached out to staff at the detention center and offered services. The Bookmobile librarian first went through the small library collection at the detention center, cleaned up the collection and added donated items. Working with detention center staff, we developed a request form for inmates that helps us find the right book for their interests. This program has really taken off, we have since donated a book truck so county staff can deliver books, we have added volunteers to help with the program and we deliver between 80 and 100 books to inmates each month. This is such an important service, typically persons who are incarcerated have low literacy levels and they are bored. They look forward to getting their books and the detention center staff love the program.

Our older users at Eagle Manor, Touchmark, Big Sky, Cooney, Aspen Garden, Hunter's Pointe and the Masonic Home nursing home and assisted living facilities depend on access to the Library through the Bookmobile. We are now connecting some users with the Talking Book Library at the Montana State Library.

The impact of bookmobile services on the younger members of our communities has been phenomenal. Children love the Bookmobile, teachers at the schools we serve have worked closely with Library staff to get just the right book in their student's hands. Since hitting the ground in November 2012, Bookmobile circulation has continued to increase each year. Last year, circulation on the bookmobile was up 6% and patrons visiting the bookmobile was up more than 50% over the previous year. And finally, amazingly, storytime attendance on the bookmobile is more than 400% since 2014.

With our outreach service, we are reaching new audiences of people who cannot visit the library, we are establishing lasting relationships with our users at each stop, we are providing full access to the county system's collection through the Bookmobile.

Lewis and Clark library does an awful lot with the \$.40 per capita funding allocated to our library. We are making a huge difference to our rural constituents and those that simply cannot make it to a library branch. I ask that you help us maintain this level of service to our very large community.

I urge you to continue the per capita/per square mile state aid statutory appropriation which will make sure that libraries all over the state, libraries of all sizes continue to provide the best services to their patrons.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.